

# 10

## Implementing the Vernal Project

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### In This Chapter:

#### Five Phases

**Development Phase D1: Conceptualize, Plan, and Generate Interest**

**Development Phase D2: Develop and Test the Curriculum**

**Phase 1: Launch the First Vernal Center and Prepare for Expansion**

**Phase 2: Replicate the Vernal Center across the United States**

**Phase 3: Maintain at a Stable Level, Then Evaluate and End**

#### A Note on Speed

#### Next Steps: Launching the Vernal Project

*Right now, the Vernal Education Project is just an idea. How could we turn this dream into reality?*

As I currently envision it, the Vernal Project would have five phases — two development phases to launch the project (and nurture it through the difficult first years), and then three main phases to carry it out. Aspects of each phase are summarized in Figure 10.1 and described in more detail below.\*

In the first development phase, the initiators of the project conceptualize it, plan it, and interest others in it. A

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\* Note that I have chosen to set Vernal Project Year 1 to be the first year of Phase 1. I have designated the three years of Development Phase D2 as Prep-1 to Prep-3. The years before Prep-1 have no special designation.

major part of this effort is writing, publishing, and publicizing this book (an effort that began in 1988 and will continue for a few years after publication of this book). By discussing the idea with interested activists, we would develop a core group of two or three volunteer staffmembers. Assuming that we collectively decided to proceed with a project similar to the one described here,† we would then develop and facilitate a few prototype one-day workshops for activists.

In the second development phase, lasting three more years, we would raise sufficient funds to pay staffmembers, develop a small organization of 2.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) paid staffmembers and a board of directors, develop a preliminary curriculum for the Vernal program, arrange internships with local social change organizations, attract students, and test the curriculum in one-day workshops and in a six-month pilot session. In the last year, we would prepare for Phase 1 by attracting more students for the first full Vernal session.

In Phase 1, lasting for five years, we would create and develop a Vernal center in one metropolitan area. We would facilitate the first eleven sessions — one each year for the first two years and several during each of the last three years. This would require attracting about 300 paying students and hiring more staffmembers. In the last year of this phase, we would also prepare to

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*Thunder is good,  
thunder is impressive,  
but it is the lightning  
that does the work.*

— Mark Twain

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† Once a group assembled, we would make decisions consensually, incorporating the best ideas of everyone and proceeding accordingly. What we would come up with might differ significantly from what is described here.

**Figure 10.1: Summary of Vernal Phases**

Phase	Name	Project Years	Main Tasks
<b>Development Phase D1</b>	<i>Conceptualize, Plan, and Generate Interest</i>		<i>Generate interest and attract volunteer Vernal Project staffmembers</i>
<b>Development Phase D2</b>	<i>Develop and Test the Curriculum in a Pilot Session</i>	<i>Prep-1 to Prep-3</i>	<i>Generate wider interest, develop and test the curriculum, raise start-up funds, hire staffmembers, attract the first students</i>
<b>Phase 1</b>	Launch the first Vernal Center and Prepare for Expansion	1 to 5	Generate wider interest, attract students, facilitate the first eleven sessions, build the organization, prepare for expansion
<b>Phase 2</b>	Replicate the Vernal Center across the United States	6 to 20	Replicate the center in 49 other locations across the United States, conduct several thousand sessions for thousands of students
<b>Phase 3</b>	Maintain at a Stable Level and then Evaluate/End	21 to 60	Conduct 8,000 sessions for 240,000 Vernal students

replicate the program to another region of the country by hiring additional staffmembers.

In Phase 2, lasting fifteen years, we would replicate the center across the United States until there were fifty centers facilitating 200 sessions each year.

In Phase 3, lasting for forty more years, the Vernal centers would continue to facilitate 200 sessions per year. At the end of this phase, we would evaluate and then probably end the Vernal Project.

Please note that I have formulated this preliminary proposal in some detail to show that there is at least one feasible way to launch and sustain the Vernal Education Project. I have spent a great deal of time considering what steps would be required to implement the project and how long each would take, and I believe this particular proposal could work. However, this is not a final blueprint. As the other initiators and I work together to launch the Vernal Project, we will develop a new, more detailed plan. This plan will include the best of all the initiators' ideas and address the social change environment we find ourselves in at that time.

**FIVE PHASES**

**Development Phase D1: Conceptualize, Plan, and Generate Interest**

For the Vernal Project to come into existence, we must first develop the idea and then excite enough people to make it viable. Development Phase D1 began in January 1988 when I first began to write this book, and it will continue until there is sufficient interest and involvement to move on to the second development phase. I hope we can

reach this milestone within two years after publication of this book.

By necessity, this first development phase has an indefinite length and the time frame for each task is uncertain. Once we have enough interest to move into Development Phase D2, then the schedule should adhere more closely to a specific timeline as shown in Figure 10.2.

**A. DEVELOP THE PROJECT AND GENERATE INTEREST AMONG A SELECT GROUP OF ACTIVISTS**

**1. Write, Publish, and Publicize this Book**

The main task of this phase is to write, publish, and publicize this book. I began writing this book as a way to explore the concept of creating a good society and to solidify my ideas about social change. It seemed that it might be possible to create a good society through the means I had learned from my work as a change activist, but I was not exactly sure how to go about it. I decided that writing a book would force me to specify each step, to critically evaluate each aspect of the process, and to assess whether the overall effort could be successful. I also assumed a book would provide a relatively clear document for conveying these ideas to others.

After three years of thinking and writing, I was convinced that it is possible to create a good society and that this could best be accomplished through mass education and grassroots social change movements. In December 1990, I circulated a draft of this book to dozens of people including many experienced activists. I received extensive

*Every new opinion, at its starting, is precisely in a minority of one.*  
— Thomas Carlyle



critical feedback that spurred me to revise and expand the book. I distributed this revised draft to about twenty activists in 1997 through 2000 and then incorporated their comments and criticism.

I plan to publish this book in 2001 (if you are reading it, then I must have succeeded). Over the following two years, I intend to engage in an extensive book tour to generate interest in the Vernal Project. As much as I am able and can arrange speaking engagements, I will make presentations to bookstore patrons, community groups, college students, and activists.\* To generate more interest, I will send a press release describing the book and the Vernal Project to about one hundred progressive organizations. I may place a small advertisement in progressive magazines such as *The Nation*, *In These Times*, *Z Magazine*, *The Progressive*, and *Mother Jones*. I will also publish the book on the Vernal Project web site and invite discussion of the Vernal Project idea. I also plan to send email announcements to a variety of activists.

## 2. Write Articles and Have Them Published

To stimulate greater interest in the project, I plan to write several articles summarizing the ideas in the book.† I

*The worst thing is to get involved with people who aren't passionate about what they're doing.*

— Willem Dafoe

will try to have these articles published in progressive journals such as *The Nation*, *Z Magazine*, *The Progressive*, the *Nonviolent Activist* (published by the War Resisters League), *Fellowship* (Fellowship of Reconciliation), *Peacemakers*, *The Ark* (National Organizers Association), *Deep Democracy*

(Alliance for Democracy), *Peace and Change*, *Socialist Review*, and similar publications as well as educational journals. I will also post articles on the Vernal Project web site.

## 3. Discuss the Project Idea with Other Activists

Since 1989, I have discussed the idea of the Vernal Project with a large number of people. Many are intrigued by the concept and a few are very excited by it. Several long-term activists and educators have expressed interest in working on the project, but none has yet made a commitment. Once this book is completed, I will work vigorously to attract more activists to the Vernal Project by having extended discussions with those who express interest in it.

### B. ASSEMBLE A CORE GROUP OF TWO OR THREE VOLUNTEER STAFFMEMBERS

Before Development Phase D2 can begin, we must gather a core group of several staffmembers who are willing

and able to volunteer more than ten hours per week for several years. I hope that the work of Task A above will generate enough interest that we can assemble a core group of volunteer staffmembers within two years after publication of this book.

Starting a large project like this from scratch is difficult. The initiators of the Vernal Project must be strongly committed to bringing it to fruition. Also, since there will be little or no money to pay these staffmembers for the first few

*The man who goes alone can start today; but he who travels with another must wait till that other is ready.*

— Henry David Thoreau

## Essential Traits of the Initiators of the Vernal Project

The initiators of the Vernal Project (two or three people) must be very committed to progressive social change and have strong abilities in a variety of areas. Specifically, they should have these qualities:

- Knowledgeable about social change theory and practice.
- Knowledgeable about a variety of current progressive issues.
- Experienced working for progressive social change: researching issues, educating the public, building social change organizations, challenging dysfunctional institutions and cultural norms, and building alternative institutions.
- Skilled at developing educational materials: workshop agendas, notes, and papers.
- Experienced working in a cooperative organization or living in a cooperative household.
- Physically and emotionally healthy.
- Experienced in working through emotional hurts.
- Experienced supporting other people through their hard times and emotional injuries.
- Aware of their own cultural upbringing, especially its negative aspects.
- Able to work with a wide variety of people and a wide variety of cultures.
- Willing and able to adopt new cultural norms.
- Willing to relocate to the location where we decide to launch the project.

• Willing and able to work without pay for several years to develop and build the Vernal Project (enough savings, a part-time job that pays well enough to provide support, and/or a willingness to live simply).

\* My first public presentation, long before publication of the book, was on January 29, 1998 at the offices of Bay Area Action, Palo Alto, California. I presented the ideas to about forty environmental activists and friends.

† One short article was published as a letter to the editor in *Z Papers*, 1:2 (April–June 1992), (Boston: South End Press), pp. 55–56.

years, they will need to have savings or some other part-time job to cover their living expenses.

Naturally, if we are unable to find enough other activists qualified and eager to initiate the Vernal Project, then we would be forced to abandon the idea.

### **C. SET UP AND FACILITATE ONE-DAY WORKSHOPS**

As I envision it, once the core group convenes, we would develop several evening and one-day workshops for educating activists. These prototype workshops would cover a few selected topics from the full Vernal program. They might be in various locations around the country or all in one location. Students would pay a small fee to cover the cost of the meeting room and preparation expenses.

These workshops would give us experience facilitating, give us a chance to practice working together, and begin to establish our credibility as activist educators. During this time, we would also develop workshop notes, lists of readings, and an outline of a preliminary curriculum.\*

This would also be a time for each of the initiators to identify her strengths and weaknesses and learn to support each other. We would work together to develop our skills and minimize our cultural and emotional blocks. In addition, we would discuss and modify the plans for the Vernal Project. In this process, we would grapple with our different perspectives, and learn to cooperate and struggle gently with one another.

### **D. RAISE SUFFICIENT FUNDS TO PROCEED**

To ensure there would be sufficient energy to facilitate these short workshops and prepare for Development Phase D2, I assume we would pay one or several staffmembers a small stipend in the last year of Development Phase D1. This small sum, totaling \$12,000†, would only partly pay for the staffmembers' effort — they would still mostly be volunteering their time. In order to pay this small stipend, we would need to raise \$12,000 in donations, foundation grants, or long-term loans sometime near the beginning of that year. I feel certain we could secure this relatively small amount of money.

By the end of this last year of Development Phase D1, we would also need to be sure we had sufficient resources to proceed to Development Phase D2. In Phase D2, we would be formally hiring several staffmembers, so expenses would rise significantly. Before we could proceed, we would either need to raise sufficient funds or we would need to generate enough interest in the Vernal Project that we felt confident we could soon raise enough money. If interest or funding were insufficient, then we would need to halt or delay the project until circumstances were more favorable.

\* As a model, we could use the notes and agendas developed for the workshops I have facilitated over the past twenty years on consensus decision-making and nonviolent action. These papers are available on the Vernal Project web site: <<http://www.vernalproject.org>>.

† All monetary figures in this book use 1995 dollars. The actual amounts would include inflation since 1995.

We would also probably want to secure nonprofit status to make it easier to receive grants from foundations and individual donations.

## **Development Phase D2: Develop and Test the Curriculum**

Assuming the work in Phase D1 went well and there was sufficient interest in the Vernal Project, we could then begin Development Phase D2. In this three-year phase (in the years designated Prep-1, Prep-2, and Prep-3), we would develop the curriculum and test it — first in two ten-day workshops and then in a six-month pilot session. During this phase, we might also continue to offer evening and daylong workshops to test newly developed parts of the curriculum. We would continue to publicize the Vernal Project to attract interest and support. In this phase, we would also secure enough funds, through grants or loans, to hire several staffmembers.

### **A. DEVELOP A COMPLETE CURRICULUM AND LIST OF READINGS**

We would develop the curriculum mostly during the first two years of this phase in conjunction with the two ten-day workshops. Developing the detailed materials for the curriculum would require several steps:

- Interview experienced activists for their views on the information activists need to know to be effective.
- Locate and review existing materials and curricula used in other activist schools and workshops.
- Research books and magazines looking for additional information.
- Draw up a detailed plan of workshop and study group topics.
- Prepare detailed workshop agendas, notes, figures, and annotated bibliographies.
- Circulate these materials to experienced facilitators and activists for review.

### **B. SET UP AND FACILITATE TEN-DAY WORKSHOPS**

In each of the first two years of this phase, we would facilitate a ten-day workshop. In the timeline (Fig. 10.2), these workshops are shown taking place in the third quarter of Vernal Year Prep-1 and the second quarter of Year Prep-2. These two workshops would help us refine the curriculum notes and gain additional experience educating activists. Each of the thirty students would pay a fee of \$500 to cover the basic expenses of the workshops. With scholarships, I estimate the average collected would be \$300 (\$9,000 total).

Setting up and facilitating these workshops would involve four main tasks:

#### **1. Secure a Facility**

We would need to find a good facility for the workshops — preferably a retreat center in a beautiful location. We probably would need to reserve the facility at least six

months before the workshops took place. We would also need to hire a cook to prepare meals for the workshop. The timeline shows these tasks taking place in the first quarter of Vernal Year Prep-1 for the first workshop and the fourth quarter of Prep-1 for the second workshop.

## 2. Attract Students

To provide enough time for participants to learn about the workshops and apply for admission, we would need to start publicizing each workshop at least six months before it began. We would send mailings to activist organizations, talk with individual activists we knew, and make presentations in as many forums as possible. The timeline shows these tasks taking place in the first and second quarters of Vernal Year Prep-1 for the first workshop and the fourth quarter of Prep-1 and the first quarter of Prep-2 for the second workshop.

Because the Vernal program would be new and have no reputation, it might be difficult to attract students. Those most likely to be interested would probably be activists with direct personal connections to the Vernal staffmembers and with each other. If we could not find enough interested students, then we would need to delay or end the project.

## 3. Choose Students and Collect Tuition

For these initial workshops, we would probably accept most of the activists who applied for admission. Only if there were many applicants could we be more selective and choose a more diverse mix of activists. Sending out acceptances and collecting tuition would probably take about six weeks.

## 4. Facilitate the Ten-Day Workshops

These workshops would give us additional facilitation experience, give us more practice working together, and establish our credibility as activist educators. At the end of each workshop, we would ask the students to criticize the curriculum and facilitation process so we could make improvements.

## C. DEVELOP A SMALL ORGANIZATION

To accomplish the work required in this phase, we would need a small paid staff and a formal organization.

### 1. Hire Staffmembers

In this phase, we would hire several staffmembers to facilitate and administer the first Vernal center. Those hired would probably be the same activists volunteering in Development Phase 1. I assume that in Vernal Year Prep-1 there would be one full time equivalent (FTE) paid staffmember, in Prep-2 there would be two FTE paid staffmembers, and in Prep-3 there would be 2.5 FTE paid staffmembers.

By the third year of this phase (Prep-3), the team (which might be composed of four or five people) must have enough expertise to facilitate the six-month pilot session. Optimally, at least one staffmember would also have prior

experience administering a school or other nonprofit organization, and at least one would be experienced in raising funds.

Even though the salaries would be modest (\$18,000/year plus benefits) and the workload high, I believe it would be possible to find enough staffmembers. There are not many other good social change jobs, so these would probably be desirable positions. However, if we could not find enough skilled staffmembers, then we would need to delay or end the project.

### 2. Set Up a Small Office

We would need to establish an office to handle the administration of the pilot session and to prepare for the first complete session. During this phase, the office could be minimal — probably just a room in someone's home, a computer, an answering machine, and a post office box for a mailing address.

### 3. Develop Office Procedures and Staffing

In this phase, we would also need to develop administrative procedures and coordinate staffing. As the center grew, we would need to continually develop and refine our procedures.

### 4. Develop a Board of Directors and Governance

At the beginning of this phase, we would need to find seven or eight people willing to serve on a board of directors for the first Vernal center. We would try to assemble a board with a diverse mix of activists and educators. I think it would be relatively easy to assemble a strong board comprising people who were excited about the Vernal Project and committed to making it succeed. Again, if we could not, then it would probably be best to delay or end the project rather than proceed without the necessary support.

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#### Steps in a project:

1. *Wild enthusiasm*
  2. *Disillusionment*
  3. *Total confusion*
  4. *Search for the guilty*
  5. *Punishment of the innocent*
  6. *Promotion of non-participants*
- Office Graffiti
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### 5. Raise Sufficient Funds to Proceed

Expenses in this phase would be significant. The two ten-day workshops and six-month pilot session would require renting a retreat center and paying a cook. As described above, we would also hire several staffmembers and pay them a modest salary.

I assume expenses for retreat center rental, food, and a cook for the six-month pilot session would total half as much as a regular session and salaries would be \$18,000/year for full-time work plus benefits. As described above, the ten-day workshops should bring in about \$9,000 each. As described below, the pilot session should bring in tuition income of about \$1,800 per student (\$54,000 total).

With these assumptions, expenses would exceed income by \$22,000 in Year Prep-1, by \$46,000 in Prep-2, and by \$23,000 in Prep-3, resulting in a total deficit of \$103,000 by the end of this development phase (see Figures 6.13 and B.18 for details). The slight excess of income over expenses in the early years of Phase 1 would not make up this shortfall until Vernal Year 5.

Before we could hire staffers, we would need to secure sufficient funds through grants or loans to cover this anticipated shortfall. We would probably seek grants from progressive foundations and donations or loans from supportive individuals.

I am reasonably confident that we could raise this money if everything else were on track.\* However, if the funds did not materialize, then it would probably be wise to end the project at this point rather than attempt it without the necessary capital. Lacking these relatively minimal resources, we would probably be unable to launch the project satisfactorily, and it is likely the project would ultimately stumble and fail.

#### **D. FACILITATE A SIX-MONTH PILOT SESSION**

At the beginning of the third year of this phase (Vernal Year Prep-3), we would offer a six-month pilot session to thirty students. This pilot session would have approximately the same schedule as the first six months of a full Vernal session. It would include study groups, social change work, social service work, a single internship in the second quarter, an introductory five-day workshop and two ten-day workshops.

This pilot session would allow us to develop the enrollment and administrative procedures, test the curriculum, and work out solutions to the problems we encountered. This pilot session would involve six main tasks:

##### **1. Secure Facilities for the Workshops**

We would need to secure the facilities at a retreat center for the three workshops.

##### **2. Attract Students and Accept Applications**

Since the pilot session would require a six-month commitment from the students, we would need to start recruiting at least nine months before the session began. As before, we would send out mailings and talk to individuals and organizations.

If we were unable to attract enough students, then we would probably end the Vernal Project at this point. For the project to succeed, it must generate sufficient interest (and tuition income) during this critical development phase.

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\* Based on drafts of this book, a very generous individual has offered an interest-free, 10-year loan of \$100,000 as soon as a core group of Vernal staffers has assembled and other key parts of the project are underway. Assuming this person's offer is still available when we reach this point, we should be able to proceed without additional fundraising effort.

##### **3. Choose Students and Collect Tuition**

Once we had received applications, then the board of directors and staffers would need to choose a class of thirty students, notify them of their acceptance, arrange scholarships, and collect tuition fees. This process would probably take about eight weeks.

##### **4. Arrange Internships**

We would need to arrange an internship with a local progressive organization for each of the thirty students. To find sufficient opportunities, we would need to begin this process at least six months before the session began. Good internship opportunities would be critical to the success of the Vernal Project. If we could not find enough high-quality internships, we would probably have to delay or end the Vernal Project.

##### **5. Facilitate the Pilot Session**

Finally, we would need to facilitate all aspects of the pilot session.

##### **6. Evaluate**

After the pilot session concluded, we would evaluate the whole process by asking students, internship agencies, and everyone else involved to give feedback about what worked well and what did not. This would allow us to modify the whole program to serve students better.

#### **E. PREPARE FOR PHASE 1**

While the pilot session was underway, we would begin preparing for the first full session. As before this would require four main preparation tasks:

##### **1. Secure Facilities for the Workshops**

##### **2. Attract Students and Accept Applications**

##### **3. Choose Students and Collect Tuition**

##### **4. Arrange Internships**

We would also need to increase the number of paid staffers to three (full-time equivalent) by the end of this phase.

At the end of this development phase, we would critically evaluate the prospects for continuing. If the pilot session had gone well and if we had a strong organization, a good reputation in the community, wide interest and support from progressive activists, and sufficient resources, then we would proceed. If we did not, then we would probably end the project and shift our efforts to some other worthy endeavor.

## Phase 1: Launch the First Vernal Center and Prepare for Expansion

Once we had developed, tested, and evaluated the program in the pilot session, we could begin the first true phase of the Vernal Project. In Phase 1, lasting five years, we would facilitate eleven year-long Vernal sessions — one each year for the first two years, then two in the third year, three in the fourth year, and four in the last year. All of these sessions would probably be in the same metropolitan area.

### A. PREPARE FOR THE VERNAL SESSIONS

As before, we would spend the nine months before each session preparing for it. As the Vernal Project became better known, finding students would probably get easier.

#### 1. Attract Students and Accept Applications

#### 2. Choose Students, Arrange Scholarships, Collect Tuition

#### 3. Arrange Internships

### B. FACILITATE AND ADMINISTER THE VERNAL SESSIONS

For the first two years, we would begin one new session each year. This would leave ample time for the three staffmembers to refine the whole process of facilitating sessions, arranging suitable workshop facilities, finding good internship opportunities, attracting students, and working out logistical and operational bugs. By Vernal Year 3, we should have a stable and effective process and could start facilitating two sessions per year — the second starting six months after the first. By Year 5, we would be facilitating four sessions each year, with a new one starting every three months.

At the beginning of this phase, we would still be making major revisions to the study guides and reading lists. However, by the fourth year we would probably need to revise the curriculum only in minor ways — with new materials that reflected changes in the world (new political issues, new world hotspots, changing U.S. government policy, and so forth). As I envision it, over the next fifty-six years, the basic curriculum would remain mostly stable — evolving slowly to encompass new issues, new ideas, and new educational methods.

### C. BUILD THE VERNAL ORGANIZATION AND PREPARE FOR REPLICATION

Once the first Vernal center was established and growing, we would need to develop a more formal organization that could find and oversee internships, guide the study groups, plan the logistics for workshops, copy materials, arrange publicity, send correspondence, handle admissions, maintain financial books (including payroll), hire new

staffmembers and prepare them, manage other personnel matters, and create new Vernal centers around the country.

#### 1. Hire More Staffmembers

By Year 4, we would need to hire a fourth staffmember to help facilitate and administer the greater number of sessions being facilitated. This person might be a recent graduate of the Vernal program. We would also need to establish a more formal office and furnish it with desks, file cabinets, computers, and so on. We would also probably want to set up a small library of books for use by Vernal staffmembers and students for research.

In anticipation of even more rapid growth in the future, we would need to hire a fifth staffmember in Year 5 whose primary work would be hiring, preparing, and supporting new staffmembers. This new staff preparer would need to have previous experience hiring, aiding, and guiding new personnel.

#### 2. Examine and Assess Good Locations in Other Regions

In the fourth year, we would look for a good location for a new Vernal center in another region of the United States. We would try to choose a city with a large progressive community so that attracting interest and support would not be hard.

#### 3. Hire Staffmembers for One New Region and Prepare Them

Once we had chosen the new region, we would need to replicate all the Vernal center functions there. During the last year of Phase 1 (Vernal Year 5), we would need to hire three staffmembers for the new center and prepare them to manage it. The new staffmembers would probably be hired in the new location and then brought to the old center for a few months of orientation.

Staffmembers in the new region would need to develop their own board of directors for the new Vernal center. They would also need to arrange internships and attract students for their first session, which would begin in Vernal Year 6.

## Phase 2: Replicate the Vernal Center across the United States

Over the next fifteen years (Vernal Project Years 6 to 20), we would replicate the Vernal program all across the United States until there were fifty active centers, each with a full team of four FTE staffmembers and each facilitating four sessions each year (200 total sessions per year).

### FIFTY VERNAL CENTERS IN TEN REGIONS

As I envision it, each new Vernal center in a region would facilitate just a single session for the first year or two. This would give the new staffmembers a chance to establish themselves, develop office procedures and staffing patterns,

develop a strong board of directors, set up good internship opportunities, and attract students. It would also allow some time for the reputation of the center to grow. Over the next three years, the number of sessions facilitated each year would increase to four and the team would grow to four FTE staffers.

In the following year, this lead center would be strong enough that it could hire three staffers to start another complete center in another city within the same region. With a great deal of support from the lead center, I assume each one of these new centers would be strong enough to immediately facilitate two sessions in its first year and four sessions in its second and subsequent years.

In order for the Vernal network to grow to fifty centers this quickly, each lead center in a region would need to help start a new center within its region every year until it had launched the full number of centers for that region. Moreover, the lead center in the first region would also need to help launch new centers in all the other regions (see Figures B.13 and B.14 in Appendix B for details). According to this plan, almost half of the centers would be fully operational (facilitating four sessions each year) by Vernal Year 17, and all would be at this level by Year 21.

This rapid expansion would probably be tumultuous and the first few sessions conducted by each center might be substandard. However, by the end of this phase, most of the fifty centers should have robust programs.

### A GROWING NUMBER OF STAFFMEMBERS

As shown in Figure B.16 in Appendix B, the number of staffers facilitating sessions would grow from eight in the first year of this phase (Vernal Year 6) to 200 by the end of the last year (Year 20). As the Vernal network grew, we would hire additional people to help administer the programs within each region. I assume we would hire a regional administrator as soon as two centers opened in a region and then would hire an additional half-time administrator whenever another center in that region opened. Hence, by Year 21, there would be twenty-five FTE regional administrators. We would also hire special new staff preparers to hire, prepare, and support new staffers. I assume we would need one new staff preparer for about every ten new staffers hired.

Following this plan, the Vernal network would grow until there were 229 FTE staffers in Year 21 (see Figure B.18 in Appendix B for details).

### Phase 3: Maintain at a Stable Level, Then Evaluate and End

For the next forty years (Vernal Project Years 21 to 60), the fifty Vernal centers would continue to facilitate four sessions each year. As before, this would include attracting applicants, accepting applications, choosing students, arranging scholarships, collecting tuition, arranging internships, guiding study groups, facilitating workshops, and

administering the centers. The fifty Vernal centers would enroll a total of 6,000 students each year. Together, they would have an annual budget of about \$14 million.

At the end of this phase in Vernal Project Year 60, we would end the project. By then we would have either succeeded in fundamentally transforming society or the Vernal program would seem antiquated. If we had succeeded, then much of the Vernal curriculum would likely be an integral part of the public school system (in whatever form that system had evolved). If we had not yet succeeded, then we should probably develop new strategies more in keeping with the times and shift the resources of the Vernal network to those new projects.

Like many ideas and projects, the Vernal Project might have gone astray sometime over the course of these sixty years. It is also possible that by that time the United States would no longer dominate the rest of the world, or there might be new forces of oppression which we cannot even imagine now. Whatever had occurred, it would be time to carefully evaluate the whole project and choose new directions. The project would be discontinued and all the staffers encouraged to find other opportunities. Another project could then arise that is more appropriate to the end of the twenty-first century.\*

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*If your contribution has been vital, there will always be somebody to pick up where you left off, and that will be your claim to immortality.*

— Walter Gropius

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### A NOTE ON SPEED

If everything proceeded according to this timeline, the Vernal Project would be quite small for many years. To all appearances, little would happen throughout the many years of Development Phase D1 and not much during the three years of Development Phase D2. Even through the five years of Phase 1, the Vernal Project would only educate a few hundred activists. Not until several years into Phase 2, perhaps fifteen years from now, would there be sizable numbers of Vernal graduates. Only then would the Vernal Project begin to have a noticeable effect on society.

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*Take time for all things: great haste makes great waste.*

— Benjamin Franklin

*Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler.*

— Albert Einstein

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\* If it seemed the project was going well but required a few more years to complete, then perhaps it could be continued for another set period. However, this extension should be limited to five or ten more years at most. It is imperative that the Vernal Project not become another perpetual institution that could lose its way or be captured and manipulated by the power elite. The project should do its task and then end.

It may seem like this is too long a time. I have tried to design a timeline that moves along as quickly as possible, but is still realistic. My experience indicates that it takes time to create a new project, figure out the details, and develop workable procedures. Moreover, it takes time to build relationships, to understand other activists, and to struggle through differences. Most importantly, it takes time for people to hear about a new project, evaluate it, decide that it has merit, and decide to support it. Since students would be making a major commitment of time and money, it would probably take a great deal of time to convince them of the value of their participation in the project. I think this timeline proceeds as fast as is prudent to enable ultimate success.

In fact, the timeline may seem too rapid. We will have to work diligently and skillfully to accomplish all the necessary tasks in the time specified. Nevertheless, I think it is critical to move at least this fast. Otherwise, activists may come to believe that the project will never really take off. They must feel confident that their efforts will lead to further efforts, and the total effort will lead to creation of a good society in a reasonable amount of time.

## **NEXT STEPS: LAUNCHING THE VERNAL PROJECT**

Since you are reading this book, I have successfully completed the first part of Development Phase D1. Still, much must be done before the Vernal Project can proceed.

### **Requirements Before Proceeding**

Of the many requirements that must be satisfied for the Vernal Project to sprout and grow, two are particularly crucial:

- (1) At least two experienced activists (and preferably three) must commit themselves to making the project succeed. For several years, these initiators of the Vernal Project must work long hours as unpaid volunteers and then for several more years for relatively low wages. I have made this commitment, so I only need to find one or two others who are also willing and able to dedicate themselves to this project through the initial development phases.

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*People can be divided into three groups: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who wonder what happened.*

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— John Newburn

- (2) There must be a large number of activists interested in becoming Vernal students. From now through the end of Phase 1, we would need to attract about 450 activists who would be willing to spend a year attending a yearlong program that is practically unknown. These students would also need to be willing and

able to pay an average of \$3,600 tuition (in 1995 dollars) and be willing and able to work half time for social change for seven years after graduating.

This book, the articles that the initiators of the Vernal Project will write, and the speeches we will make must be sufficiently enticing to attract widespread interest and support. A large number of potential students must believe that it is possible to create a good society and that the Vernal Project will greatly assist this process. They must be eager to make the project happen. To determine if there is sufficient interest, we might survey the activist community near the site of the first Vernal center. As soon as we received a large enough number of favorable responses, we would know we could proceed.

### **My Role**

I fervently hope this project will proceed, and I plan to work vigorously to make it succeed. Over the last decade, I have striven to expand my skills so that I am capable of doing the tasks necessary to carry out the project. I have also worked assiduously to increase my physical, emotional, and financial health so that I have the ability to make it succeed. I plan to work long and hard on it, and I believe my contribution will be valuable.

Because I have invested so much time and energy in designing the Vernal Project and preparing this book, it has unavoidably become “my” project. However, for the project to succeed, it must be owned by an ever-growing number of people — first a few initiators, then the early Vernal staffmembers and students, and finally everyone connected with the project. As much as I am able, I will try to let go of the project and let it become “our” project. Once the team of initiators has assembled, I assume we would work collectively on an equal footing.

I look forward to discussing all aspects of the Vernal Project and working cooperatively with others to reshape it in whatever ways make sense. I will do my best to support and encourage others to take responsibility and credit for all that we do. I am open to changing every aspect of the Vernal Education Project. I am even willing to hand the project over to others to carry out if they are more capable than I am. My greatest desire is to create a good society, and I will play whatever role seems best to accomplish that goal.

Some activists may be inspired by this book, but feel the Vernal Education Project is not the best way to proceed. They may have very different ideas about how to bring about fundamental change, and they may launch their own separate projects. I hope they do, since their projects may succeed where this one fails. Over the long run, those projects that do well will grow and prosper, while those that go astray will die from their own weaknesses or be superseded by better projects.

## What You Can Do

If you like the Vernal Education Project and would like to help it proceed, here are some things you can do:

### • TELL OTHERS

Loan this book to your friends and family members. Tell others about the Vernal Project web site. Send an email message to your colleagues. Inform everyone who might support this vision. Discuss the ideas and the assumptions. Do they make sense? Is it possible for the Vernal Project to succeed? Would enough people join the project and could they overcome the obstacles that stand in the way? Is this an exciting vision that inspires hope? Is it a project with which you would like to be a part?

### What You Can Do Right Now to Learn Activist Skills

If you are reading this before the Vernal Project has reached Phase 3, there probably is not yet a Vernal center in your area. Until there is, you can learn activist skills on your own. Here are some suggestions:

- Read the books and magazines, and explore the web pages listed in Chapter 12 and on the Vernal Project web site. Talk with other people who have thought about social change issues. Question your assumptions about current reality. Explore possible paths to create a better society. What would a good society look like? What institutions and cultural norms would need to change? How would they be different? What stands in the way of positive societal change? What is the best way to create a good society? What can you do to move society in that direction? What do you need to know? What do you need to teach others?
- Find a personal transformation technique with which you feel comfortable (such as meditation, counseling, massage, or a support group) and engage in it regularly. What emotional injuries have you incurred? What destructive cultural conditioning have you absorbed? In what ways do you act out dysfunctional behavior? How can you act better? Who could help you? How could they help you? How can you help others?
- Contribute resources (time, money) to activists working for positive social change. What resources do you have? What can you give?
- Work for positive change with other activists. Make a commitment to work at least half time for seven years for fundamental progressive transformation of society.

### • BECOME ONE OF THE INITIATORS OF THE PROJECT

If you have the necessary skills and experience and you are excited enough to devote a significant amount of your time over the next few years, then become one of the initiators of the project. Let's work together to create a strong project.

Critically evaluate the Vernal Project and work with us to make it even better. What has been overlooked? How could we make the project stronger?

### • CREATE YOUR OWN BETTER PROJECT

Critically evaluate the Vernal Project and design a better one:

What experiences have you had that contradict my assumptions? What kind of project would make more sense? Start a project that you believe would be more likely to

*If a better system is thine, impart it; if not, make use of mine. — Horace*

succeed. Go for it! May the best project succeed! Every effort for progressive social change contributes to our ultimate success.

### • WORK WITH OTHER SOCIAL CHANGE EFFORTS

If you do not have the necessary desire, skills, or experience to become an initiator of the Vernal Project and you do not plan to launch your own project, then join an existing social change effort. There is much work to do, and many good organizations with which to work. Find a group that appeals to you and do what you can to make the world better.

## SUMMING UP

This chapter describes a preliminary plan for implementing the Vernal Education Project and presents a detailed timeline. This tentative scenario seems feasible, and I intend to do my best to carry it out. Please join me in making it a reality.

*We are face to face with our destiny and we must meet it with a high and resolute courage. For us is the life of action, of strenuous performance of duty; let us live in the harness, striving mightily; let us rather run the risk of wearing out than rusting out.*

— Theodore Roosevelt

